Libya’s independence in 1951 marked the beginning of the end of formal colonial rule as well as the emergence of the “dependency-decolonization” debate over the degree to which Africa’s newly independent countries truly control their international relations (see Shaw and Newbury 1979). According to a group of observers belonging to the dependency school of thought, the granting of legal independence to the fifty-four African countries that comprise the African nation-state system did little to alter the constraining web of economic, political, military, and cultural ties that continued to bind African countries to the former colonial powers (Amin 1973). This conceptualization of African international relations, often called neocolonialism (Nkrumah 1965), is especially prominent in writings about the relationship between France and its former colonies, primarily due to policies designed to maintain what French policymakers often referred to as their chasse gardée (literally “exclusive hunting ground”) in francophone Africa (Suret-Canale 1975). Even in those former colonies where the European power was either too weak (e.g., Spain) or uninterested (e.g., United Kingdom) to preserve privileged ties, the contemporary independence era witnessed the gradual replacement of European neocolonial relationships with a new set of ties dominated by other great powers, such as the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the United States, and the former Soviet Union and its successor state, Russia (Laidi 1990). In short, dependency theorists argue that direct colonial rule has been replaced by a series of neocolonial relationships that perpetuate external domination of African international relations.

Scholars of the decolonization school of thought argue instead that legal independence beginning in the 1950s was but the first step of an evolutionary
process permitting African leaders to assume greater control over the international relations of their countries (Zartman 1976; see also Bayart 2000). According to this perspective, although external influences were extremely powerful in the immediate post-independence era, layer upon layer of this foreign control is slowly being peeled away with the passage of time. While carefully underscoring that individual African countries can follow different pathways, proponents of the decolonization school argue that the most common pattern begins with legal independence, followed by efforts to assure national sovereignty in the military, economic, and cultural realms. “In this view, each layer of colonial influence is supported by the others, and as each is removed, it uncovers and exposes the next underlying one, rendering it vulnerable, untenable, and unnecessary,” explains I. William Zartman (1976:326–327), a prominent proponent of the decolonization school. “Thus, there is a natural progression to the removal of colonial influence: its speed can be varied by policy and effort, but the direction and evolution are inherent in the process and become extremely difficult to reverse.”

The durability of the dependency-decolonization debate is demonstrated by how both sides interpret the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the subsequent spread to the African continent of the “third wave” of democratization in global history (Huntington 1991). According to decolonization theorists, Africa since 1989 is undergoing a second independence or a second national liberation in which a new generation of African leaders is assuming greater control over the international relations of their respective countries. One example of this trend is Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution in 2011 that overthrew the dictatorship of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, ushered in a multiparty democracy, and sparked other pro-democracy movements, especially in North Africa and the neighboring Middle East (Schraeder and Redissi 2011). In sharp contrast, dependency theorists equate the end of the Cold War and the third wave of democratization with the rising marginalization of African countries in international relations. They argue that African leaders enjoy fewer, rather than more, options in a post–Cold War international system marked by an increasingly intrusive UN system, international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and exploitative great powers and regional powers (e.g., Shaw 1991). Focusing on aggressive foreign efforts to promote democratization and economic reform, some observers have even suggested that a “recolonization” or “new scramble” for Africa is occurring (Ake 1995; Carmody 2011; Southall and Melber 2009).

Although the dependency-decolonization debate is far from being resolved, 2018 marked a symbolic turning point as Africa’s contemporary independence era (1951–2018) had lasted as long as the core colonial era (1884–1951). This chapter is designed to provide food for thought for the dependency-decolonization debate through the exploration of five topics
within the broad arena of African international relations: the formulation and conduct of African foreign policies; pan-Africanism and the African Union (AU); regional economic cooperation and integration; the role of foreign powers in African international relations; and the United Nations and international financial institutions.

**African Foreign Policy in a Changing International Environment**

African countries have a rich foreign policy history dating back to the pre-colonial independence era, when diplomacy was key to the relationships between literally hundreds if not thousands of independent political systems and kingdoms. The case study of West Africa, as described in the work of Robert S. Smith (1976) and Joseph K. Adjaye (1996), demonstrates the existence of sophisticated diplomatic practices that in many respects are similar to those of the twenty-first century. For example, the dispatch of diplomats to neighboring political systems was common. Often called “messengers,” “linguists,” or “heralds,” these individuals sometimes lived as resident diplomats in neighboring political systems. Unlike contemporary diplomats who work at elaborate embassies that may employ hundreds of workers, the resident diplomats usually served as the sole representatives of their peoples.

African diplomats also carried diplomatic credentials or “badges of office.” Whereas all contemporary diplomats carry special diplomatic passports, their precolonial African counterparts carried various culturally significant credentials that included canes, staffs, whistles, fans, batons, and swords. Representatives of the Ashanti kingdom of present-day Ghana carried a diplomatic staff. The staff was topped by the figure of a hand holding an egg. This image was designed to “convey the warning that neither the king nor his representative should press a matter too hard nor treat it too lightly” (Adjaye 1996:12). Regardless of culture or the period in which they lived, few, if any, diplomats would question the diplomatic message portrayed by the Ashanti staff’s image.

A third similarity with current diplomatic practices was the observance of diplomatic protocol and etiquette. It was not uncommon for African diplomats to enjoy diplomatic immunity (freedom from political harassment or persecution by local authorities). This practice was also an extension of the traditional African custom of warmly welcoming African strangers in their midst. Another example of diplomatic protocol and etiquette was the tendency of African kings “to converse only indirectly with their visitors and subjects” (Adjaye 1996:14). What was intended as a sign of respect and courtesy inevitably ensured a prominent role for diplomatic intermediaries, especially those who were knowledgeable about foreign languages and practices.
A final example of diplomacy that resonates with the contemporary era revolves around the “deliberate” and “tortuous” pace of diplomatic negotiations (Adjaye 1996:16). Extensive public flattery and gift giving, most notably intricately woven cloths, were integral aspects of such negotiations. One custom, still popular in West Africa, is the tradition of beginning or ending negotiations with the mutual breaking and eating of kola nuts. Available throughout West Africa, the kola nut is a stimulant that allows discussants to stay awake during extended periods of negotiations that sometimes last throughout the night. The kola nut, a symbol of West African hospitality, is broken into an equivalent number of pieces and shared among the participants attending the meeting.

The diplomatic practices of precolonial African kingdoms were significantly altered due to several international turning points during the past 150 years, beginning with the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885. As a result of this conference, independent Africa except for Ethiopia and Liberia ceased to exist, and African diplomatic relations were controlled by the European colonial powers. A second international event—the extended global conflict of World War II (1935–1945)—heralded the decline of Europe as the most powerful region of the world and the emergence of African nationalist movements intent on achieving independence from colonial rule. This period marked the beginning of the end of colonial rule and the return of control over foreign policy to Africans. The outbreak and intensification of the Cold War (1947–1989) transformed the newly independent African countries into proxy battlefields between the United States and the former Soviet Union, the unparalleled superpowers of the post–World War II era. African conflicts often having little, if anything, to do with the ideological concerns of communism or capitalism threatened to become East-West flashpoints in the face of growing US-Soviet involvement. A fourth international event, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, signaled the end of the Cold War but not the end of international rivalry in Africa. The ideologically based Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union was replaced by a Cold Peace (1989–present), in which the great powers struggle for economic supremacy in Africa. The security dimension of this Cold Peace became evident in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, as the United States sought to enlist its African allies in a global war on terrorism. As African leaders continue to guide their countries during the third decade of the new millennium, they must manage their countries’ foreign policies in an international environment marked by the growing competition among the great powers, most notably France, Germany, Japan, the PRC, Russia, and the United States, as well as a number of rising regional powers with interests in Africa, including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.
The classic theme of studies of contemporary African foreign policy is that foreign policy begins and ends with the desires of African presidents (Korany 1986; see also Adar 2015; Cohen 2015; Wright 1998). The primary reason for what has become known as the “big man” syndrome of African foreign policy is that the majority of the first generation of African presidents who took power beginning in the 1950s systematically suppressed and dismantled centers of power capable of challenging the foreign policy supremacy of the presidential mansion. Various efforts undertaken by these leaders included the stifling of a free press, the suspension of constitutions, the jailing of political opponents, the dismantling of independent judiciaries, and finally the co-optation or jailing of legislative opponents (Schraeder 2004c). In short, the institutional actors typically associated with making their voices heard in the foreign policy making processes of democratic countries were often marginalized in the name of creating single-party regimes capable of promoting unity and development.

The net result of what in essence constituted a highly centralized foreign policy machinery was the promotion of personalized foreign policies derivative of the interests and idiosyncrasies of individual presidents (Jackson and Rosberg 1982). In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mobutu Sese Seko assumed power in 1965 through a military coup d’état.
supported by the US government, renamed the country Zaire, and gradually concentrated all power around the office of the president (Young and Turner 1989). Often unwilling to listen to his foreign policy experts within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and having effectively silenced other potential centers of opposition, most notably by disbanding the Zairian National Assembly, Mobutu was known for declaring policies that created international controversy. During a presidential visit to the United States in 1973, Mobutu made a speech before the UN General Assembly in which he announced his decision to rupture all diplomatic ties with Israel. This decision was notable in that it was made without any warning to the Richard M. Nixon White House and effectively derailed State Department efforts to win congressional passage of a Zairian foreign aid bill (Schraeder 1994b:82).

A second outcome associated with the centralization of foreign policy is that the first generation of African presidents often pursued foreign policies strongly tied to those of the former colonial powers. In addition to the variety of formal ties (e.g., military treaties) that bound the newly independent countries to the former colonial powers, the primary reason for what proponents of the dependency school would characterize as “dependent” foreign policies (e.g., Shaw and Aluko 1984) was the shared culture and political values of colonially trained African presidents and their European counterparts. Despite having actively campaigned for political independence, several first-generation presidents benefited from colonial efforts designed to ensure the victory of leaders sympathetic to European concerns. In the case of Senegal, for example, former president Léopold Sédar Senghor, sometimes described by his critics as more French than Senegalese, married a French national, retired to a home in France, and carries the distinction of being the first African to be inducted into France’s highly prestigious and selective Académie Française, the national watchdog of French language and culture (see Markovitz 1969).

The most important outcome of the rise to power of the first generation of African presidents is that these leaders would often be more responsive to the foreign policy concerns of their external patrons than to the popular demands of their own peoples. Especially in the case of francophone Africa, the first generation of African presidents signed a variety of defense agreements with France that, rather than ensuring protection from threats from abroad, were designed to ensure their political longevity. Since the 1960s, France has intervened militarily more than thirty times in its former colonies, often at the request of African presidents either under threat from internal opposition movements or seeking to be reinstated in power after being overthrown. Even in cases where pro-French leaders were overthrown by military coups d’état during the decade of the 1960s, the guiding principle of French involvement was the willingness of a particular leader to support French foreign policy objectives. For example, when asked why France did not militar-
ily intervene when David Dacko, a democratically elected president of the Central African Republic, was overthrown in a military coup d'état in 1966, Jacques Foccart, architect of France’s policies toward francophone Africa under Presidents Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou, noted in his memoirs that the new leader, Jean-Bédel Bokassa, “after all was a very pro-French military man” (Foccart, with Gaillard 1995:287).

The combination of the Cold War’s end and the spread of pro-democracy movements throughout Africa beginning in 1989 has contributed to the democratization of African foreign policies (Adar and Ajulu 2002; Adar and Schraeder 2007). The cornerstone of this democratization trend, especially in countries where multiparty elections have been held, is the alternation of power between long-entrenched (often authoritarian) elites and democratic successors who have very different visions of how best to restructure their domestic political systems. An example of this process was the replacement in 1990 of Namibia’s local version of South Africa’s apartheid system with a multiparty democracy led by elites associated with the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO), most notably former guerrilla leader Sam Nujoma, who served as the country’s first democratically elected president from 1990 to 2005. The foreign policy implication of the alternation of power is that new, democratically elected elites may not necessarily share the foreign policy goals and interests of their authoritarian predecessors. The emergence of such new elites should also provide the basis for a realignment in foreign policy, in terms of both the substance of foreign policy and preferred foreign policy relationships, especially in those cases in which a previously unpopular elite was able to illegally maintain itself in power at least partially due to the interventionist practices of the former colonial or another great power. In Namibia, Nujoma’s 1990 election under the SWAPO banner signaled the beginning of a restructuring of Namibian foreign policy, most notably the downgrading of foreign policy ties with countries allied to apartheid South Africa, which had served as Namibia’s de facto colonial power after Namibia was placed under South African trusteeship at the end of World War I.

The democratization process has also altered the centralized foreign policy structures in several African countries (Schraeder 2001b; Schraeder, with Gaye 1997). In some cases, democratization has been accompanied by policies designed to decrease both the size of the military establishment and its involvement in governmental affairs, including in the realm of foreign policy (Barany 2012, 2019; Kieh and Agbese 2004). In South Africa during the 1980s, the military strongly argued in favor of the Afrikaner regime’s decision to undertake destabilization policies against its immediate neighbors (Grundy 1986). In the wake of the country’s first multiparty elections in 1994, therefore, the new government headed by Nelson Mandela undertook a series of reforms designed to restore greater civilian control over a military
force that had become too prominent in both domestic and foreign policies (Bischoff and Southall 1999). Although civilian control of the military has endured in South Africa, other transitional democracies have not had the same level of success. A case in point is Egypt’s transition to democracy in 2011 as marked by the democratic election of President Mohamed Morsi, which was followed by a military coup in 2013 and a return to military rule.

The democratization process has also led to the strengthening of institutional actors, most notably increasingly independent and vocal national legislatures, capable of challenging the presidency in the foreign policy realm (Barkan 2009; Salih 2005). The primary reason behind this newfound legislative role is the creation of democratic political systems that embody the concept of separation of powers between the various branches of government. In the aftermath of Benin’s transition to democracy, the democratically elected National Assembly in December 1995 refused to ratify highly unpopular legislation that would have permitted the launching of a third structural adjustment program (SAP) promoted by both the administration of President Nicéphore Soglo (1991–1996) and the IMF and the World Bank. President Soglo’s subsequent attempts to break the political stalemate between the legislative and executive branches of government (he announced his intention to launch the SAP through the “exceptional power” granted to the executive under Article 68 of the Constitution) were one of the critical factors that strengthened popular discontent to such a degree that he lost the 1996 presidential elections to his autocratic predecessor, President Mathieu Kérékou (Adjovi 1998:107–139). Soglo had severely underestimated the power of his legislative opponents and their ability to translate deep-seated popular resentment of foreign-imposed SAPs into electoral defeat at the ballot box. For perhaps the first time in African political history, a democratically elected parliament played a critical role in ensuring the defeat of a previously popular and democratically elected president.

The democratization process also portends greater popular input into the foreign policy making process as the policies of a new generation of African leaders are increasingly held accountable to public opinion (see, e.g., Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005). Even during the Cold War era, public opinion played an influential, albeit intermittent, role in African foreign policies. For example, it has been argued that public opinion, fueled primarily by radio broadcasts by Radio France Internationale, was the primary factor that led to bloody clashes between Senegal and Mauritania in 1989 (Parker 1991; see also Pazzanita 1992). Despite the fact that this conflict was neither desired nor promoted by President Diouf of Senegal or President Ould Taya of Mauritania, and despite their best efforts to contain public passions, both of these leaders were confronted by violent clashes that spiraled out of control. In a sense, both leaders, as well as the foreign policies of their respective countries, became prisoners of public opinion.
Numerous nonstate actors potentially play important foreign policy roles. In Senegal, for example, Islamic leaders known as *marabouts* constitute an integral part of the domestic political system and play both informal and formal roles in the making of foreign policy (Villalón 1995). They especially played a critical role in reducing tensions between Senegal and Mauritania in the aftermath of the 1989 border conflict by shuttling back and forth across the river that separates the two countries. An equally dramatic case occurred in mid-1980s, when the Diouf administration was forced to withdraw an invitation to Pope John Paul II to visit the country due to the threats of leading *marabouts* to call upon their *taalibe* (disciples) to occupy the runways at the international airport. Although the pope was subsequently reinvited and visited Senegal several years later in 1991, to the wide acclaim of both Muslims and Christians, the *marabouts* had clearly served notice that sensitive issues needed to be raised with them in advance if the president wished to avoid embarrassing public confrontations. In short, if one wants to completely understand the formulation and implementation of Senegal's foreign policy, as well as that of other African countries, one must take into account the role of religious actors. These can include religious actors within Islam, Christianity, and other religious traditions (e.g., Judaism), not to mention traditional African religions.
A vast literature focuses on the emergence of violent nonstate actors, most notably African insurgent groups and terrorist organizations, and their influence on African foreign policy (Varin and Abubakar 2017). The emergence of these actors has been at least partially fueled by the traditional foreign policy dilemmas of porous national borders and expanses of ungoverned territory that are common to all African countries. “The fundamental problem facing state-builders in Africa—be they colonial kings, colonial governors, or presidents in the independence era,” explains Herbst (2000:11), “has been to project authority over inhospitable territories that contain relatively low densities of people.” The classic violent nonstate actor involves insurgent groups that undertake military attacks against the central government (Boás and Dunn 2007, 2017; Clapham 1998). In some cases, they even create parallel diplomatic networks to promote their guerrilla causes. Such networks are typically limited to neighboring countries that provide economic and military support and that serve as the bases of military operations. The most extensive diplomatic network maintained by an African guerrilla insurgency was that of the African National Congress (ANC). From 1960, the year that the ANC was banned by South Africa’s apartheid regime, to 1994, the year that Nelson Mandela emerged victorious in South Africa’s first multiracial, multiparty democratic elections, the ANC established and maintained over forty diplomatic missions in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere (Pfister 2003). A more recent example involves the Polisario Front, which seeks to create an independent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) from territory claimed and controlled by Morocco. As of 2020, the SADR was recognized by over forty countries, several of which host SADR embassies. The SADR also enjoys observer status at the African Union.

Pan-Africanism and the African Union
African nationalists were inspired by the anticolonial activities of peoples of African descent living in North America and the West Indies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result, these nationalists sought to promote a unified African front against colonial rule. What subsequently became known as the pan-African ideal was most forcefully enunciated for the first time at the 1945 meeting of the Pan-African Congress held in Manchester, England. At the conference, participants adopted a Declaration to the Colonial Peoples that affirmed the rights of all colonized peoples to be “free from foreign imperialist control, whether political or economic” and “to elect their own governments, without restrictions from foreign powers” (Ajala 1988:36). In a separate Declaration to the Colonial Powers, participants underscored that if the colonial powers were “still determined to rule
mankind by force, then Africans, as a last resort, may have to appeal to force in the effort to achieve freedom” (Ajala 1988:36).

The pan-African ideal gained momentum during the heady independence era of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In an opening address to the first gathering of independent African nations on African soil, held in 1958 in Accra, Ghana, President Kwame Nkrumah proclaimed, “Never before has it been possible for so representative a gathering of African Freedom Fighters to assemble in a free independent African state for the purpose of planning for a final assault upon imperialism and colonialism” (Ajala 1988:39). According to Nkrumah, the realization of the pan-African ideal required a commitment between African leaders and their peoples to guide their countries through four stages: (1) “the attainment of freedom and independence”; (2) “the consolidation of that independence and freedom”; (3) “the creation of unity and community between the African states”; and (4) “the economic and social reconstruction of Africa” (Ajala 1988:30).

Despite overwhelming agreement among African leaders that pan-Africanism constituted a worthy foreign policy goal, disagreement existed over the proper path to ensure such unity. One group of primarily francophone countries known as the Brazzaville Group (named after the capital of the Republic of Congo) sought a minimalist approach: the coordination of national economic policies through standard diplomatic practices. Little consideration was given to the possibility of creating continent-wide institutions. In contrast, Nkrumah and other leaders, who belonged to what became known as the Casablanca Group (named after the Moroccan city), argued instead that the success of pan-Africanism required a political union of all independent African countries, patterned after the federal model of the United States. In speech after speech, Nkrumah promoted two themes that became the hallmark of this international vision: “Africa must unite!” and “Seek ye first the political kingdom!” (Rooney 1988).

A third group of African leaders, who belonged to what became known as the Monrovia Group (named after the capital of Liberia), rejected the idea of political union as both undesirable and unfeasible, primarily due to the assumption that African leaders would jealously guard their countries’ newfound independence. They nonetheless sought a greater degree of cooperation than that espoused by the Brazzaville Group. Led by Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, prime minister of Nigeria, the Monrovia Group called for the creation of a looser organization of African states. According to this vision of African international relations, African countries would guard their independence but promote growing cooperation in a variety of functional areas, most notably economic, scientific, educational, and social development. An important component of the Monrovia Group approach was a desire to create continent-wide institutions that would oversee and strengthen policy harmonization.
In May 1963, thirty-one African heads of state largely embraced the Monrovia vision of African international relations by launching the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the first pan-African, intergovernmental organization of independent African countries based on African soil. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was chosen as the site for the OAU headquarters, and all major decisions and resolutions were formally discussed at the annual Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The sovereign equality of all member states was an important guiding principle of the organization, which differed significantly from the great power domination of the UN, given the special powers conferred upon the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: France, the PRC, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The OAU was particularly vocal in its unwavering opposition to colonialism and white minority rule, most notably minority white–ruled regimes in Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the former Portuguese-controlled territories of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé and Príncipe. The OAU established a Liberation Committee based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to aid liberation movements with both economic and military assistance (Akindele 1988a). Although disagreements often arose over which tactics would best ensure transitions to majority-ruled governments (e.g., should one support dialogue with a white regime or fund a guerrilla insurgency?), every OAU member expressed public opposition to the continued existence of minority white–ruled regimes. The work of the Liberation Committee largely came to an end in 1994, when South Africa transitioned to a multiracial, multiparty democracy.

The OAU’s thirty-nine-year existence is correctly described as a “victory for pan-Africanism” (Olusanya 1988:67). Both critics and sympathetic observers nonetheless questioned the organization’s ability to play an effective role in African international relations (Amate 1986; El-Ayouty 1994). In a special issue of the Nigerian Journal of International Affairs, which assessed the OAU’s continued relevance on the “Silver Jubilee” (twenty-five-year) anniversary of the organization’s creation, one Nigerian scholar expressed sadness over the fact that, despite the best of intentions, the OAU had failed to live up to the expectations of its original framers (Olusanya 1988:70).

More than forty African heads of state convened in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002 to launch the AU, as the pan-African successor organization to the OAU. Like its OAU predecessor, the AU is headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; is based on the sovereign equality of all member states; holds an annual Summit of Heads of State and Government; adopts official positions on a wide array of diplomatic topics affecting the African continent; and counts on a number of offices and institutions designed to strengthen African cooperation, most notably a Pan-African Parliament...
headquartered in Midrand, South Africa, that is comprised of 235 elected members from AU member states (African Union 2011).

The AU is led by a ten-member executive body—the African Commission—that is composed of a chairperson, deputy chairperson, and eight commissioners who are responsible for the following eight portfolios:

- *Political Affairs*, such as democratic elections and human rights
- *Peace and Security*, most notably efforts devoted to conflict resolution
- *Economic Affairs*, inclusive of promoting regional integration
- *Infrastructure and Energy*, such as the development of the transportation and telecommunications sectors
- *Social Affairs*, ranging from sports and migration to health issues and antidrug efforts
- *Human Resources, Science, and Technology*, such as education and new information technologies
- *Trade and Industry*, most notably efforts devoted to trade and investment
- *Rural Economy and Agriculture*, inclusive of food security and protection of the environment

The impacts of the AU and its predecessor OAU on African international relations are highlighted by the evolution of three sets of international principles, each of which holds important implications for the dependency-decolonization debate. The first principle—the inviolability of frontiers inherited from the colonial era—served as one of the cornerstones of the OAU Charter. Due to the multiethnic nature of most African countries, African leaders were concerned that changing even one boundary would open a Pandora’s box of ethnically based secessionist movements and lead to the further Balkanization of the African continent into ever smaller economic and political units (Davidson 1992). In the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970), the OAU not only refused to permit the provision of aid to Biafra (the secessionist southeastern portion of the country) but voted a series of resolutions that underscored official support for the Nigerian federal government (Bukarambe 1988:98). This decision upset international human rights activists, as well as several African countries aiding the secessionist government, because the military-dominated Nigerian government was using starvation methods designed to bring the Biafrans to their knees (Gordon 2003:141–142; Stremlau 1977). As ethnic tensions and separatist movements intensified in the post–Cold War era, African leaders remained firmly committed to maintaining borders inherited from the colonial era. Although the OAU recognized the sovereignty of Eritrea in 1993, after a UN-sponsored referendum in that country resulted in overwhelming popular support for independence, African leaders subsequently noted that this process did not question the hallowed concept of the inviolability of frontiers.
Unlike most African countries, Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia after independence from colonial rule and, therefore, enjoyed the legal right to withdraw from that voluntary union (Iyob 1995).

In contrast, the AU decided not to include a statement in the Constitutive Act establishing the organization that recognizes the inviolability of frontiers inherited from the colonial era, providing the new organization with greater political flexibility. It is thus not surprising that the AU embraced the Southern Sudanese decision achieved via referendum in January 2011 to secede from the Republic of Sudan and create a separate and sovereign Republic of South Sudan. South Sudan’s independence was recognized by the AU in 2011, which permitted the country to join the organization that same year. The AU nonetheless remains heavily inclined toward maintaining the territorial integrity of member states, as witnessed by its continued refusal to recognize the independence of the Somaliland Republic, despite the fact that this territory has enjoyed de facto independence since the collapse of the Republic of Somalia in 1991. Somaliland submitted a bid for membership to the African Union in 2005, which prompted the organization to send a fact-finding mission to the territory that same year. Although the final report of the fact-finding mission concluded that the African Union “should find a special method of dealing with this outstanding case,” no further progress has been made (ICG 2006).

A second principle embedded in the OAU Charter but rejected by the AU is noninterference in the internal affairs of member states. In the early years of the OAU, African leaders debated whether to allow military leaders who had illegally deposed their civilian counterparts to maintain their OAU seats. This debate was resolved in favor of recognizing whatever group controlled the reins of power in a particular country (Akindele 1988b:82–85). More significant was the silence among African leaders concerning human rights abuses in OAU member states. “Increased repression, denial of political choice, restrictions on the freedom of association, and like events occurred, with rare murmurs of dissent,” explains Claude Welch Jr., a specialist on human rights in Africa. “The OAU seemed to function as a club of presidents, engaged in a tacit policy of not inquiring into each other’s practices” (Welch 1991:537). During the 1970s, for example, Ugandan dictator Idi Amin was elected OAU chair despite his personal involvement in “politically sanctioned repression and murders” in Uganda (Welch 1991:538).

Although still reluctant to criticize their counterparts, African leaders began to accept a growing role for the OAU in addressing human rights abuses at the beginning of the 1980s. In 1981, the annual Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Banjul, Gambia, adopted the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (popularly called the Banjul Charter). Despite the ratification of this charter, the OAU’s response to
events in Nigeria during 1995 demonstrated the organization’s reluctance to translate human rights rhetoric into policy action. In response to disturbances among the Ogoni ethnic group in southeastern Nigeria, which began in 1990 over control of that region’s vast oil resources, Nigeria’s military regime unleashed a brutal campaign of repression that included the November 1995 execution of Nobel Peace Prize candidate Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists on trumped-up murder charges (French 1995:E3; see also Osaghae 1995). Although OAU secretary-general Salim Ahmed Salim expressed “disappointment” over the fact that the Nigerian generals failed to “respond positively” to OAU appeals for clemency, the organization did not adopt concrete, comprehensive measures to punish or to internationally isolate the Nigerian regime (quoted in French 1995:E3).

The AU has clearly rejected the OAU principle of noninterference in the domestic affairs of member countries. In fact, Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act affirms “the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity,” and Article 4(j) underscores “the right of Member States to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security” (Murithi 2007:16–17). “With the adoption of these legal provisions, for the first time in the history of Africa, the continental organization [the AU], working through an appointed group of states, has the authority to intervene in internal situations in any state that may lead to atrocities against minority groups or communities at risk,” explains Tim Murithi (2007:17). “In other words, the AU has the right and the responsibility to act.” The AU has also adopted the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, thereby committing member states to strengthening democratic practices, most notably holding free and fair elections and ensuring freedom of expression. It is precisely for this reason that the AU has strongly denounced military coups that have overturned constitutionally elected governments, including suspending Mauritania’s AU membership in the aftermath of an August 2008 military coup d’état.

A third and final principle—the peaceful settlement of all disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, or arbitration—was adopted by both the OAU and the AU. However, the OAU’s embrace of support for the previous two principles of territorial integrity and noninterference in the internal affairs of member states historically impeded that body’s ability to mediate either internal conflicts or conflicts between two or more member states. In the 1967–1970 Nigerian civil war, almost reflexive support for the territorial integrity of Nigeria seriously called into doubt, at least from the viewpoint of the secessionist Igbos, the OAU’s ability to serve as an impartial negotiator. For this reason, the OAU Commission of Mediation, Arbitration, and Conciliation was “stillborn” (Zartman 1995b) and most African-initiated arbitration
efforts were carried out on an ad hoc basis by African presidents. For example, Djiboutian president Hassan Gouled Aptidon used his country’s stature as the headquarters for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to mediate the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia. According to Zartman (1995a:241), a specialist of conflict resolution, such efforts led to success in only 33 percent of roughly twenty-four cases, and this success was often only temporary in nature as warring parties returned to the battlefield.

The ability to dispatch peacekeeping or peacemaking forces once a conflict has broken out is a critical aspect of conflict resolution. The OAU founding fathers attempted to prepare for this eventuality by planning the creation of an African High Command, a multinational military force comprised of military contingents from OAU member states. The African High Command never made it beyond the planning stage, leading once again to a variety of ad hoc measures. In 1981, the OAU sponsored the creation of a short-term, all-African military force designed to resolve an expanding civil war in Chad. Composed of approximately 4,800 troops from Zaire, Nigeria, and Senegal, the OAU force “failed to achieve any concrete solution” due to financial, logistical, and political difficulties and within a few months was “forced to withdraw” (Gambari 1995:225).

The AU has sought to undertake a more robust and leading role in conflict resolution through the establishment of an “ambitious and complex” African Peace and Security Structure, including the creation in 2003 of a Peace and Security Council. This body is made up of fifteen member states that can authorize the imposition of economic sanctions against regimes that have assumed power due to unconstitutional changes (e.g., military coups d’état), or the deployment of military missions under the AU banner. Another component includes an African Standby Force that will enable the AU to react more quickly to security threats, but that remains a work in progress (Engel 2017:263, 269–270). In this regard, the AU has been more aggressive than its predecessor. Its first peacekeeping mission was in Burundi in 2003, followed by a deployment to Darfur, Sudan, in 2004, which was handed off in 2007 to the UN. The most extensive and long-running deployment, entitled the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), has been in southern Somalia, beginning in 2007 under a mandate from the UN Security Council and continuing as of 2020. The primary goal has been to support the UN-recognized government in Mogadishu against Islamist forces known as al-Shabaab. The peacekeeping mission in Somalia has been controversial, due to the deaths of numerous AU soldiers; disputes between AU member states (e.g., Eritrea historically was opposed to AMISOM’s intervention); internationalization of the conflict (e.g., Turkey has deployed military forces to the region); the continued weakness of the Mogadishu federal government, which controls very little territory outside of Mogadishu (and would likely fall without
foreign support); and the continued strength of al-Shabaab in the rural areas. Despite a greater commitment to conflict resolution, the AU, like the OAU, has been unable to create a permanent African force capable of responding to African conflicts.

The combination of Africa’s unstable nation-state system and the basic weakness of the OAU and AU in military affairs has led to a variety of military interventions by individual countries and intergovernmental organizations (Gegout 2017; Schmidt 2013, 2018; Tang Abomo 2019). Four sets of actors periodically have intervened in African conflicts: (1) the UN, as demonstrated by its approval of more than twenty peacekeeping missions in Africa since 1989, not to mention the UN Security Council’s authorization for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to undertake military operations in Libya during spring 2011 that led to the overthrow of the regime of Muammar Qaddafi; (2) African regional organizations, such as the decision of the Economic Community of West African States to sponsor a military intervention in Gambia in 2017 to force dictator Yahya Jammeh to cede the presidency to his democratically elected successor, Adama Barrow; (3) foreign powers, most notably France, the United States, and to a lesser degree the United Kingdom, as witnessed by French military intervention in Mali in 2013 to prevent separatists in northern Mali from declaring an independent country of Azawad; and (4) African powers, as demonstrated by Ethiopian and Kenyan military interventions in southern Somalia against the Islamist forces of al-Shabaab.

The tendency of African countries to militarily intervene in neighboring countries has become increasingly prominent in the post–Cold War era (Reno 2011; Thom 2010). The most extreme example of this trend was the expansion of civil conflict in the DRC into what foreign observers now commonly call Africa’s First World War. At its height in 2002, this conflict was marked by the introduction of massive numbers of ground troops by at least five African countries: Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, which were fighting on the side of the DRC’s government, and Rwanda and Uganda, which were seeking to topple that government. Although the individual stakes of the African countries that contributed troops to this conflict were varied (Clark 2002), together they underscored an emerging reality of African international relations at the dawn of a new millennium: the rising importance of African regional military balances of power and the political-military and economic interests of African regional actors. Africa, having provided a battlefield for superpower interests during the Cold War, provides another for rising African powers intent on dominating the international relations of their respective regions, most notably South Africa in Southern Africa and Nigeria in West Africa. Other regional powers that have attempted to use their size, economic power, and military capabilities to affect their regions include Algeria and Egypt in North Africa, Sudan and
Ethiopia in East Africa, the DRC in Central Africa, and Senegal in West Africa. Moreover, from the perspective of pan-Africanists, such ad hoc interventions, regardless of whether undertaken by foreign or local African powers, are ultimately undesirable; rather than representing an African consensus opinion, such interventions are ultimately driven by the self-interests of the intervening country.

**Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration**

Inspired by the success of the European Union and encouraged by the UN-sponsored Economic Commission for Africa, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the first generation of African leaders sought to create regional entities capable of promoting regional cooperation and integration. This vision of African international relations was best captured by the OAU’s publication in 1981 of a document, *Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980–2000*, which proposed the establishment of a continent-wide African Economic Community that would be based on an African Common Market. The guiding logic of the Lagos Plan of Action was that the creation of intergovernmental economic organizations in each of Africa’s five major regions—North, East, West, Southern, and Central Africa—would serve as the building blocks for a continent-wide free trade zone.

The flourishing of experiments in regional cooperation and integration throughout the contemporary independence era demonstrates the firm commitment of African leaders to the economic dimension of the pan-African ideal. By the end of the 1980s, it was estimated that at least 160 intergovernmental economic groupings existed on the African continent, with thirty-two such organizations in West Africa alone (Seidman and Anang 1992:73). Among the most notable and far-reaching economic groupings that currently exist in each of Africa’s major regions (including dates of launching) are the East African Community (EAC), which was originally launched in 1967 only to collapse in 1977, followed by its revival in 2000; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, 1975); the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU, 1989); the Southern African Development Community (SADC, 1992), which was originally launched in 1980 as the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS, 1983); and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, 1996) in Northeast Africa, which was originally launched in 1986 as the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD). These regional organizations are complemented by even larger groupings that transcend individual regions, including the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD, 1998), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA, 1981), and the continent-wide African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA, 2018).
African leaders offer several rationales for seeking regional cooperation and integration. The simplest reason is the firm belief that there is strength in numbers. In order to effectively compete within a competitive international economic system dominated by economic superpowers (e.g., the United States and China) and powerful regional economic entities (e.g., the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] zone), African countries must band together and pool their respective resources. Second, African leaders desire to promote self-sustaining economic development and particularly the industrialization of the African continent. Struggling with the reality that many of their countries are economically impoverished and lack the tools for the creation of advanced industries, African leaders believe that they can build upon the individual strengths of their neighbors to forge integrated and self-sustaining regional economies.

Most important, regional economic schemes are perceived as the best means of creating self-reliant development, thereby reducing and ultimately ridding the African continent of the ties of dependency inherited from the colonial era (Asante, with Chanaiwa 1993:741–743). For example, African leaders are rightfully concerned that national control over the evolution of their respective economies is constrained by Africa’s continued trade dependency on Europe, at the expense of intraregional trade links with African countries. For this reason, one of the primary objectives of regional economic schemes is to promote intraregional trade with neighbors who theoretically share a common set of development objectives—either due to special geographic features, historical ties, or a shared religion such as Islam in North Africa (see, e.g., Grundy 1985). By strengthening these ties with like-minded neighbors, a stronger African economic entity is expected to emerge that will be capable of reducing foreign influence and strengthening Africa’s collective ability to bargain with non-African powers on a more equal basis.

Early optimism began to wane in the aftermath of the launching of several regional integration efforts, which included the creation of supranational authorities and formal economic unions designed to promote intraregional trade and investment. In the case of the initial version (1967–1977) of the EAC, the 1967 decision of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to create a common market with common services, coordinated by a supranational governing body, collapsed ten years later and was followed in 1978–1979 by Tanzania’s military intervention in member state Uganda to overthrow the dictatorial regime of Idi Amin (Potholm and Fredland 1980). As explained by Olatunde Ojo (1985), a specialist of regional cooperation and integration in Africa, several factors that contributed to the EAC’s decline clarify why other similar efforts, from the 1960s to the present, have either failed, demonstrated minimal progress, or remained aspirational.
An initial problem was the polarization of national development and the perception of unequal gains (Ojo 1985:159–161). As typically occurred in other cases in Africa where the creation of a common market served as the cornerstone of the regional grouping, the most industrialized country (Kenya) usually reaped the benefits of economic integration at the expense of its partners (Uganda and Tanzania). For example, Kenya’s share of intra-community trade increased from 63 percent in 1968 to 77 percent in 1974, whereas Uganda’s share decreased from 26 percent to 6 percent during the same period. In addition, despite the fashioning of a common policy toward the establishment of new operations by multinational corporations (MNCs), the majority of these firms decided to locate their bases of operations in Kenya due to its more advanced economy and workforce as well as its extensive infrastructural network of roads, railroads, ports, and airports.

The EAC also foundered due to the inadequacy of compensatory and corrective measures (Ojo 1985:161–166). In every integration scheme, some countries inevitably benefit more than others. As a result, policymakers can implement measures, such as the creation of regional development banks or the disproportionate sharing of customs revenue, to correct the imbalance and compensate those countries expected to lose out in the short term. In the case of the EAC, a regional development bank was created to disburse funds in the following manner to the three members: Kenya (22 percent), Tanzania (38 percent), and Uganda (40 percent). However, in this and other cases of integration in Africa, even the richest members are usually incapable of subsidizing bank operations. The actual finances provided to the neediest members, therefore, never even begin to approach true development needs or completely compensate for losses incurred.

A third stumbling block to successful regional integration of the EAC was ideological differences and the rise of economic nationalism (Ojo 1985:168–169). Simply put, ideological differences often ensure a radically different approach to development projects, which in turn can significantly hinder regional integration. In the case of Kenya, a pro-West capitalist regime was very open to private enterprise and foreign investment, particularly the opening of local offices of MNCs. The socialist-oriented regime of Tanzania, however, opted for a self-help strategy known as ujamaa (the Kiswahili term for “brotherhood”), which not only denounced private enterprise as exploitative but also restricted the flow of foreign investment and strongly controlled the MNCs. When combined with the growing public perception of unequal gains between the two countries, these ideological differences led to often acrimonious public debate between President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and to the rise of economic nationalism in both countries.

A final element that contributed to the EAC’s decline was the impact of foreign influences (Ojo 1985:169–171). Whereas Kenya developed close
relationships with the Western bloc nations (e.g., the United States and Britain), Tanzania pursued close links with the socialist bloc (particularly the PRC) and Uganda sought links with the former Soviet Union and the Arab world. These links ensured that the EAC became embroiled in the Cold War rivalry of the 1960s and the 1970s and contributed to the creation of an outwardly directed “strategic image” that prompted EAC member states to look outward toward their foreign patrons rather than inward toward their natural regional partners (Ojo 1985).

Beginning in the 1980s, the failure and stagnation of classic integration schemes prompted African leaders to undertake looser forms of regional economic cooperation in a variety of functionally specific areas such as transportation infrastructure (e.g., regional rail links), energy (e.g., hydro-electric projects on common rivers), and telecommunications (see Aly 1994; Lavergne 1997; Onwuka and Sesay 1985; Oyejide, Elbadawi, and Collier 1997). The logic behind pursuing this form of regionalism is that it does not require the creation of supranational authorities, nor does it require policymakers to sacrifice national control over the sensitive areas of foreign trade and investment. This looser form of economic cooperation has gathered strength in the post–Cold War era, particularly as democratically elected elites increasingly assume power and seek to promote economic cooperation with other democracies in their regions. Indeed, it is this logic that undergirds all six of the current regional economic schemes in Africa.

The 1992 transformation of SADCC into SADC in Southern Africa is a good example of this trend in African regional relations (Oostuizen 2006; Peters 2010). Originally conceived as a vehicle for reducing the economic dependence of the Front-Line States on South Africa during the apartheid era, the transformed SADC now counts South Africa among its members and is seeking to enhance traditional cooperation in a variety of functional realms, most notably transportation (Khadiagala 1994; see also Love 2005). The new SADC is at “the threshold of a new era,” according to several reports published by the African Development Bank in conjunction with the World Bank and the Development Bank of South Africa. “Although its effects and the inequities it has embedded will linger for a long time to come, the demise of apartheid opens up prospects unimaginable even a few years ago,” explains one report. “New opportunities have emerged in every sector of economic activity for expanded trade and mutually beneficial exchanges of all kinds among the countries of southern Africa” (Morna 1995:65).

Several factors are essential to understanding the optimism surrounding SADC’s status as a model for economic cooperation in Africa, particularly in terms of reducing Southern Africa’s dependence on foreign economic interests and creating the basis for self-sustaining development in the post–Cold War era (see Blumenfeld 1992; see also Gibb 1998). First, the inclusion of a highly industrialized South Africa provides SADC with an
engine for economic growth that will potentially reinvigorate the entire region. In this regard, South Africa is playing a leadership role similar to that enjoyed by Germany in the EU, the United States in NAFTA, and Nigeria in ECOWAS. The majority of SADC members also share a common British colonial heritage. Although a shared colonial past is not a precondition for effective regional cooperation, it facilitates such technical matters as which language should serve as the official language of communication (in the case of SADC, English). A third facilitating factor is the decline in ideological differences between SADC member states that accompanied the end of the Cold War. Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe have discarded in varying degrees their adherence to Marxist principles of development; South Africa has officially renounced its apartheid system; and Tanzania and Zambia have dismantled significant portions of their formerly socialist economies. In essence, there is a growing consensus among SADC member states that effective regional economic cooperation must be based on a shared commitment to some variant of the liberal capitalist model of development.

A final facilitating factor is SADC’s commitment to conflict resolution and to the promotion of shared democratic values (Ohlson and Stedman, with Davies 1994). The Cold War’s end and the rise of democratization movements have led to the end of civil wars and the holding of democratic elections in many SADC countries, making SADC the most democratic of Africa’s six regional integration schemes. Indeed, one of the most important lessons of regional integration theory, which draws upon the success of the European Union, is that the existence of elites with a shared commitment to democracy is the foundation of long-term economic cooperation and development. For this reason, the 1992 Windhoek Treaty (named after the capital of Namibia), which consecrated the launching of SADC, underscored the political dimension of regional relationships and its critical role in the continued expansion of economic cooperation. A fully democratic SADC nonetheless remains aspirational. According to Freedom House, which annually ranks each country of the world according to its level of political rights and civil liberties, six SADC countries as of 2020 are ranked as “free” (Botswana, Comoros, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, and Seychelles), seven are ranked as “partly free” (Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), and three are ranked as “unfree” (Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Eswatini).

One cannot underestimate especially the role of national and regional conflicts in hindering regional economic schemes. One of the primary stumbling blocks to regional unity in North Africa’s AMU involves the continuing diplomatic impasse between Algeria and Morocco over the fate of the former Spanish Sahara (Worrall 2017). Whereas Morocco has annexed this territory as part of what it considers to be the sovereign territory of the
Moroccan kingdom, Algeria instead supports independence as an independent country, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. The fact that the Algerian government continues to give political-military and socioeconomic support to the Polisario Front, which is the guerrilla organization seeking to end Morocco’s control and win independence, not surprisingly is denounced by Moroccan authorities. To this can be added the ongoing civil conflict and the lack of an effective government in Libya since the overthrow in 2011 of the dictatorship of Muammar Qaddafi. IGAD in Northeast Africa is similarly stymied by ongoing civil conflict between Somalia’s weak central government in Mogadishu and the al-Shabaab insurgency, which has spilled over into neighboring countries and invited international intervention (Adetula, Bereketeab, and Jaiyebo 2016). Moreover, an international diplomatic standoff remains between Mogadishu and the breakaway Republic of Somaliland, which in 1991 declared independence but as of 2020 has yet to be recognized by any country in the world. In short, conflict resolution constitutes an important precondition for the pursuit of meaningful regional economic cooperation.
Role of Foreign Powers in African International Relations

Many important policies affecting contemporary Africa are heavily influenced in the capitals of three sets of countries—the seven former colonial powers, four additional great powers, and several regional powers—that are significantly involved in Africa. Of the former colonial powers, France alone has continued to maintain and even expand extensive political-military and socioeconomic relationships throughout Africa, most notably in francophone Africa (Daguzan 2002; Kroslak 2004; Yates 2018). This is especially true in the more than twenty colonies where French serves as one of the official languages of administration and/or education. An important tool of French foreign policy toward Africa is the regular holding since 1973 of a Franco-African Summit that is attended by the presidents of France and Africa. This summit is usually held every two years and rotates between France and a country in francophone Africa.

In contrast, the United Kingdom’s official interest in maintaining privileged colonial ties, once rivaled only by those of France, dramatically waned during the contemporary independence era (Bangura 1983; Gallagher 2013; Styan 1996; Vines 2018; Williams 2004). Economic decline prompted British policymakers to make difficult decisions as to where limited economic resources would contribute the most to British foreign policy interests, ultimately prompting Britain’s gradual disengagement from Africa. The United Kingdom nonetheless has undertaken sporadic military interventions in its former colonies, as witnessed by its leadership role in dispatching peacekeeping troops to Sierra Leone in West Africa in 2000 (Porteous 2008). The United Kingdom’s most noteworthy ongoing involvement with its former African colonies takes place in the context of the Commonwealth of Nations, a loose association of former British colonies throughout the globe that holds an annual summit meeting of heads of state.

There is a range of activity in Africa among the other former colonial powers. At one extreme is Spain, which was never an important diplomatic player due to controlling the smallest number of colonial holdings, but which continues to maintain the only two remaining territorial vestiges of European colonial rule: the small enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla along the Moroccan coast (García and de Larramendi 2002; Naylor 1987; Segal 1989). At the other extreme is Germany, which lost its colonies as a result of World War I but is now one of the globe’s great powers. Germany especially focuses on the economic realm, serving as an important source of trade, aid, and investment (Brune, Betz, and Kuhne 1994; Engel 2002; Engel and Kappel 2002; Hofmeier 1994; Schulz and Hansen 1984). The general trend, however, is for the former colonial powers to demonstrate sporadic attention to their former colonies, usually during times of crisis or instability in Africa. This was the case for Italy in Somalia during the 1990s.
or Belgium in the DRC during the 2000s (Ercolessi 1994; Negash, Papa, and Taddia 2003; Venturi 2018). There is also a cultural element that binds former colonial powers and former colonies. For example, Portugal in the 1990s exhibited a renewed interest in strengthening cultural ties with its former Portuguese-speaking colonies and played an important role in promoting the resolution of civil wars in Angola and Mozambique (Carvalho 2018; MacQueen 1985; Penvenne 2003). One African issue that has galvanized all of the former colonial powers, but especially those with borders on the Mediterranean Sea (France, Italy, and Spain), has been the immigration crisis that emerged in the aftermath of the Tunisian Revolution of 2011 and the broader Arab Spring (Nascimbene and Di Pascale 2011). Although North Africa during the last few decades has served as a transit point for growing numbers of refugees and economic migrants from sub-Saharan and North Africa seeking a better life in Europe, these numbers significantly expanded as a result of the socioeconomic and political-military instability generated by the Arab Spring.

At the level of the great powers, the United States emerged in the 1950s as an influential political-military actor. As discussed further below, whereas anticommunism served as Washington’s guiding foreign policy principle during the Cold War, counterterrorism became the central goal in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In both cases, the United States courted anticommunist and anti-terrorist African allies willing to support Washington’s larger foreign policy goals. The former Soviet Union was also a formidable political-military actor during the Cold War but dramatically reduced its African presence after the fall of the Soviet regime in 1991 and the subsequent breakup of the country into fifteen sovereign nations (Andrés 2006; Matusevich 2007). It would only be in the latter half of the 2010s that Russia began to reassert itself in Africa as part of President Vladimir Putin’s desire to restore Russia’s great power status (Arkhangelskaya and Dodd 2016; Daniel and Shubin 2018; Fidan and Aras 2010). An important symbol of Russia’s return to Africa was the convening in 2019 in Sochi, Russia, of the first ever Russia-Africa Summit, which was attended by more than 3,000 Russian and African delegates from all fifty-four African countries, including more than forty African heads of state and President Putin (Standish 2019).

Asian great powers are also playing a crucial role in African international relations. Japan emerged during the 1980s as a rising economic power and serves as an important source of economic aid and trade for individual African countries (Cornelissen 2004; Cornelissen and Mine 2018; Lehman 2010; Lumumba-Kasongo 2010; Morikawa 1997, 2005; Nester 1992; Sato 2005). Japan’s arrival in African international relations was marked by the hosting in 1993 of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Additional TICADs have been held every three to four
years, and they are attended by the majority of African leaders. The most influential Asian great power is the PRC. As discussed in Chapter 2, China’s Ming Dynasty established substantial contacts with East Africa during the first half of the fifteenth century, before turning inward (Snow 1988; Xin-feng 2017). The same was true of communist China’s foray into Africa during the 1960s as part of the Cold War struggle, ultimately reducing its presence after the Cold War’s end (Larkin 1971; Xuetong 1988). One dimension of China’s Africa policy during this and later periods was a diplomatic battle with Taiwan as to which capital—Beijing or Taipei—was recognized by African governments as the official seat of the Chinese government (Hsiao-pong 2009; Taylor 2002). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the burgeoning demand of the PRC’s massive and growing economy for primary resources, strategic minerals, and trade outlets had fueled a dramatic expansion of Chinese-African relations (French 2014; Liu 2018; Lumumba-Kasongo 2011; Taylor 2006). This led to growing discussions among US policymakers about the potential dangers that such activities posed for Western, especially US, interests in Africa (e.g., Council on Foreign Relations 2005). China’s determination to play a leading role in Africa is captured by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the first of which was held in Beijing in 2000. Held every three years, this has become the signature event for PRC-Africa relations.

Several regional powers also play influential roles. India is recognized as a rising economic power in Africa (Cheru and Obi 2010; Dubey 1990; Karnik 1988; Taylor 2012; Virk 2018). Indonesia’s smaller role in Africa is also driven by economic interests (Tarrós 2016). Canada and the Nordic countries, most notably Sweden, demonstrate a strong humanitarian interest. Specific issues of foreign policy interest include famine relief, conflict resolution, and women’s rights (e.g., Stokke 1989). During the height of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel pursued a proactive policy that exchanged Israeli technical aid for continued or renewed diplomatic recognition of the state of Israel (Butime 2014; Decalo 1997; Dussey 2017; Levey 2008; Oded 2010; Peters 1992). Other Middle Eastern regional powers, such as Iran (Lefebvre 2012; McFarland 2010), Saudi Arabia (Creed and Menkhaus 1986), and Turkey (Korkut and Civelekoglu 2012; Ozkan 2014, 2016), pursue Islamic-inspired policies in the predominantly Muslim countries of North and East Africa. In 2020, for example, the Turkish parliament approved President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s request to send Turkish troops to Libya to bolster the UN-supported government in Tripoli in an expanding civil conflict. Finally, Brazil is the leading Latin American country that has pursued economic links with Africa (Abdenur 2018; Collins 1985; De Castro 2014; He 2012; Seibert and Visentini 2019).

The specific impact of foreign powers on African international relations is illuminated by the evolution of US foreign policy toward Africa. During
the Cold War era, US policymakers were principally guided by the ideological interest of containing the former Soviet Union and its communist allies (Schraeder 1994b). A variety of presidential doctrines, beginning with the Truman Doctrine in 1947 and culminating in the Reagan Doctrine of the 1980s, declared Washington’s right to intervene against communist advances throughout the world, including in Africa. As a result, pro-West administrations, such as Senegal under President Abdou Diouf, were treated as potential US allies deserving of foreign aid, whereas Marxist administrations, such as Madagascar under Didier Ratsiraka, were isolated. US policymakers also sought special relationships with strategically important regional actors, such as Morocco in North Africa, Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa, and South Africa in Southern Africa, that offered special military access rights or maintained important US technical facilities (e.g., telecommunications stations) deemed critical to containment policies in Africa (Lefebvre 1991). The United States nonetheless expected France and the other European allies to take the lead in their former African colonial territories. As stated by George Ball (1968), undersecretary of state in the Kennedy administration, the United States saw Africa as a special European responsibility, just as European nations were expected to recognize US responsibility in Latin America. According to US policymakers, France emerged as the only European power with both the long-term political will and the requisite military force capable of thwarting communist powers from exploiting instability (Goldborough 1978; Lellouche and Moisi 1979; see also Hoffman 1967).

The Cold War’s end meant the decline of Washington’s ideologically based policies in favor of the pursuit of trade and investment (Schraeder 1998). In 1996, the administration of President William J. Clinton unveiled the first formal US trade policy for pursuing new markets throughout Africa (US Department of Commerce 1996). The centerpiece of this economic strategy was congressional legislation, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), passed by both houses of Congress under the prodding of the Clinton White House during its second term in office. Africa’s enhanced economic standing in Washington was perhaps best captured by President Clinton’s decision to make a twelve-day presidential visit to Africa in 1998, which included stops in Botswana, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda. For the first time in US history, a sitting US president had led an extended diplomatic mission to Africa, intent on improving US-African ties and promoting US trade and investment on the African continent.¹

The response of the administration of President George W. Bush to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, nonetheless demonstrated the durability of strategic interests in great power involvement in Africa (Schraeder 2001a). These attacks profoundly influenced US foreign policy as the Bush administration announced a global war on terrorism, including pledges to aid countries threatened by terrorism that harkened back to the initial stages
of the Cold War when the Harry S. Truman administration underscored the need to aid countries threatened by communism. In the case of Africa, the Bush administration focused its efforts on North and East Africa. The microstate of Djibouti, for example, emerged in 2003 as the site for the Defense Department’s Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), the primary responsibility of which is to maintain surveillance over the movement of potential terrorist groups in the “Greater Horn of Africa.” The US-Djiboutian agreement includes the hosting of a US military base in Djibouti that enables the United States to conduct military operations against terrorist groups in the region. Additional counterterrorism programs launched by the Bush administration included the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) and the East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative (EACTI), the latter of which is now known as the East African Regional Strategic Initiative (EARSI). Together these programs are indicative of the strengthening of US security ties with African countries deemed important to the US global war on terrorism (Davis 2007).

Barack Obama’s election in 2008 as the first African American president of the United States raised “great expectations” concerning the future of US foreign policy toward Africa (Schraeder 2011a). He is the product of the African diaspora and had published two well-received books in which Africa was referenced: Dreams of My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance (1995) and The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream (2006). Obama was also the first sitting president to have visited the African continent prior to taking office, including traveling to his father’s country of Kenya for five weeks in 1998 before starting Harvard Law School, and to Chad, Djibouti, Kenya, and South Africa for two weeks in 2006 while serving in the US Senate. Africa nonetheless remained marginalized in an Obama White House that by necessity focused on domestic issues and other regions of perceived greater importance, most notably daunting challenges associated with resolving an inherited financial crisis in the US economy that reached its height as Obama entered office and inheriting two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

One of President Obama’s most controversial Africa-related decisions was to support military intervention in Libya. This decision constituted an exception to his otherwise cautious approach, and ironically had the impact of making his administration even more reticent about becoming involved in Africa. Specifically, the administration was confronted with growing international calls to prevent the regime of Muammar Qaddafi from unleashing genocide in the eastern portion of Libya. Although the White House was initially divided over the proper course of US action, Samantha Power, who served on the White House National Security Council as special assistant to the president and senior director for multilateral affairs and human rights, and Hillary Clinton, who served as secretary of state, pre-
vailed in internal bureaucratic debates in favor of a more aggressive US approach. The White House decided in favor of a US-supported and NATO-led military campaign under the banner of the international human rights norm of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) that ultimately led to the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime. However, the United States and the Western powers did little in the period following Qaddafi’s overthrow, as the country descended into civil conflict, calling into question the administration’s true commitment to R2P (Tang Abomo 2019). Indeed, Obama was quoted in a retrospective on his administration’s foreign policy as noting that he considered the Libyan intervention as the “biggest mistake” of his presidency (Goldberg 2016).

Donald J. Trump’s election in 2016 under the campaign theme of “Make America Great Again” also raised expectations, but of a different kind. It was hoped especially among Africans that a successful businessman who was the coauthor of a popular book, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, would usher in a new era of US trade and investment in Africa’s rising economies (Schraeder 2018). Yet the reality of US-African relations under the Trump administration has been a period of continued White House neglect, intensified by unfilled Africa-related posts throughout the national security bureaucracies. The White House has instead pursued a military-based, counterterrorism approach originally set in place by the Bush administration and largely continued under the Obama administration. Other broad foreign policies, especially those related to reducing immigration flows and renegotiating trade agreements, have had negative repercussions on the African continent. The so-called Muslim ban affected travel to the United States from predominantly Muslim countries, including three in Africa (Libya, Somalia, and Sudan). Africanists have been particularly dismayed by racist, Africa-related statements, including by President Trump. For example, the president was attributed as having said, “Why are we having all these people from s***hole countries come here?” as part of a White House discussion related to African, Haitian, and other immigrants of color. The reaction on the part of Africans not surprisingly was swift, and highly negative.

The common thread in US foreign policy from the Truman to the Trump administrations is that presidents traditionally have devoted less attention to Africa compared to other regions of perceived greater concern. At the top of the foreign policy hierarchy is Europe, including Russia and the other countries that were once part of the Soviet Union and that were central to the Cold War struggle, and more recently the Middle East and South Asia in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the emergence of a global war on terrorism. Subsequent foreign policy priorities include Asia (most notably how to counter a rising China) and Latin America, with Africa being last. The neglect of Africa at the highest reaches of the US policymaking establishment is the direct result of a wide array of factors: a president’s
typical lack of knowledge and, therefore, the absence of a deep-felt interest in a region that historically enjoyed few enduring political links with the United States as compared with the former European colonial powers; a tendency to view Africa as the responsibility of those same European colonial powers, especially France, whose leaders were often willing to take the lead in crisis situations; the impracticality of having one person monitor relations with 195 countries worldwide, including 54 in Africa, and, therefore, the necessity of delegating responsibility for handling foreign policy for those regions considered marginal to the White House; and the necessity of balancing domestic priorities with foreign affairs necessities, especially during a first term in office when the ultimate priority of all presidents is to assure reelection, with simple electoral logic typically suggesting that Africa is not a priority for the vast majority of the voting public. Even President Obama, who had deeper connections to Africa than any previous president before entering office, relegated Africa to the region of least importance in US foreign policy during his administration.

The net result of White House neglect of Africa is that US foreign policy toward Africa, perhaps more so than that toward any other region of the world, remains largely delegated to the high-level bureaucrats and political appointees within the bureaucracies of the executive branch. Exceptions exist, as demonstrated by the willingness of the White House to pressure Sudan’s government in 2004 to seek a peaceful resolution of civil conflict in the southern portion of the country, but these are rare occurrences typically due to pressures from grassroots constituencies that have the ear of the president and that most importantly are considered crucial to reelection. In the case of Sudan, for example, an array of Christian groups deemed essential to Republican victories in 2004 effectively lobbied the Bush White House to “do something” to stop what they perceived as a genocidal policy that a northern-based Islamic regime was carrying out against a southern-based, predominantly Christian population, including the practice of southern Christians’ being sold as slaves in northern Sudan.

In order to fully understand US foreign policy toward Africa, one must, therefore, focus on the policies and interactions of the African affairs bureaus of the traditional national security bureaucracies, such as the State Department, the Pentagon, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as well as their counterparts within the increasingly important economic realm, most notably the Department of Commerce. To be sure, the White House sets the overall parameters of US foreign policy, which impacts all regions of the world, including Africa. But the unique nature of the US policymaking system ensures that specific policy initiatives related to Africa often emerge from and are coordinated by the national security bureaucracies with little White House input. The net result of what can be referred to as bureaucratic influence in the policymaking process is the continuation of estab-
lished policies toward individual African countries, even when an administration with different beliefs than its predecessor takes office, such as in the shift from the Obama to the Trump administration (Schraeder 1994a).

It is noteworthy that the Cold War’s end had raised expectations that the great powers would coordinate with each other to address a host of challenges confronting the African continent, most notably the resolution of regional conflicts and the promotion of regional economic development (Gromyko and Whitaker 1990). Expectations of great power cooperation nonetheless were dampened by what Jeffrey E. Garten (1993) refers to as the emergence of a Cold Peace, in which the great powers compete for markets and influence in all regions of the world, including Africa. The defining characteristic of the Cold Peace, which harkens back to the “scramble for Africa” during the colonial era, is the emergence of a highly competitive and sometimes conflicting system in which great power policies are driven by the same factor: economic self-interest. This conceptualization of international politics does not preclude the existence of countervailing elements, most notably the emergence of a more cosmopolitan international regime, as marked by the 1997 Ottawa Treaty banning antipersonnel landmines, the establishment of international tribunals to deal with crimes of humanity in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, and the creation of an International Criminal Court (ICC). Nor does it ignore the durability of strategic interests in great power involvement in Africa, as witnessed by the Bush administration’s search for allies in North and East Africa in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The simple point is that economic interests are key to understanding contemporary great power competition and conflict in Africa.

Great power competition has particularly emerged in the highly lucrative fossil fuel, strategic minerals, telecommunications, and transport industries, leading to strained great power ties. In the case of France, for example, policymakers viewed the penetration by US and other Western companies as an intrusion or even as aggression into France’s sphere of influence in francophone Africa. The seriousness with which this issue was treated at the highest levels of the French policymaking establishment was demonstrated by the public admission of Minister of Cooperation Michel Roussin that a series of meetings had been held on how best to defend French interests, including those within the economic realm, against those of the United States (Glaser and Smith 1994; see also Védrine and Moïsi 2000).

The stakes involved were clearly demonstrated by competition between Elf-Aquitaine (a French oil company) and the Occidental Petroleum Corporation or “Oxy” (a US oil company) in the Republic of Congo. Desperately in need of nearly $200 million to pay government salaries before legislative elections, newly elected president Pascal Lissouba turned for help to Elf-Aquitaine (which controls 80 percent of the country’s oil production). When its French manager refused to approve either a $300 million loan or
a $300 million mortgage on the future production of three promising new offshore oil deposits, Lissouba initiated secret negotiations with the US-based Oxy. An agreement was signed but renounced eight months later by the Lissouba administration due to intense pressure from the French (Schraeder 2000). US-French competition in the lucrative petroleum industry is not limited to the Republic of Congo, nor is it unique in terms of great power relations. It is rather indicative of a more competitive foreign policy environment between the Western powers, a rising China, a resurgent Russia, and a host of emerging regional powers in which Africa has become an increasingly important source of fossil fuels, strategic minerals, and other primary resources (e.g., see Ellis 2003; Klare and Volman 2004).

Rising great power competition holds important implications for the dependency-decolonization debate. From the viewpoint of a new generation of African leaders, rising economic competition among the great powers provides an opportunity to lessen previously privileged ties of dependence and to pursue special relationships and especially economic contracts with countries willing to provide the best offer. Although the ultimate resolution of the “oil war” in the Republic of Congo in favor of France suggests that the ties of dependency were not automatically broken by the Cold War’s end, the Lissouba government nonetheless was able to obtain a better agreement from the French as a result of “playing the American card.” In other cases, such as the decision of President Patrice Talon of Benin (elected in 2016) to offer a lucrative pipeline contract to China’s National Petroleum Corporation at the expense of previously privileged ties with the French oil industry, a new generation of African leaders is successfully utilizing their increased independence within the international system to acquire the best deals for their respective countries.

The United Nations and International Financial Institutions

The relationship of African countries to the UN and to a host of international financial institutions is important to understanding the relevance of the decolonization-dependency debate (Warner and Shaw 2018). During the initial decades of the contemporary independence era, a variety of factors suggested that membership in the UN was facilitating the ability of the first generation of African leaders to assume greater control over the international relations of their respective countries (Jonah 2018). In addition to serving as a concrete symbol of African independence, UN membership also provided African leaders with an important international forum for promoting African views on a variety of international issues such as unequivocal support for the complete decolonization of the African continent, opposition to apartheid in South Africa, the promotion of socioeconomic development, and the need
for disarmament and attention to regional security. Most important, the UN provides a unique forum for diplomatic negotiations. Financially unable to maintain embassies throughout the world, let alone throughout the African continent, African diplomats take advantage of the fact that almost all countries maintain a permanent mission in New York to carry out the day-to-day business of diplomacy (Mathews 1988).

In an era in which it has become fashionable for many Westerners, particularly those in the United States, to criticize their countries’ involvement in the UN as providing few if any tangible economic or political benefits, it is important to recognize that UN agencies often play substantial administrative and development roles in many African countries. In several African capital cities, there are a variety of UN offices whose budgets and staffs sometimes approach those of their counterparts within the host government. In Dakar, the capital of Senegal, for example, offices represent a variety of UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Capturing the sentiment of African policymakers during the 1960s, a Senegalese diplomat noted that “these agencies were perceived as critical to the fulfillment of African development goals during the initial independence era, and provided a source of hope especially for those impoverished countries lacking both the resources and the expertise to implement the studies and programs pursued by each of these agencies.”

In the aftermath of the Cold War, however, a vocal segment of African leaders and intellectuals has been apt to associate the UN with foreign intervention and the imposition of Western values. This position has been partially fueled by the replacement of the classic international norms of sovereignty and nonintervention in the affairs of UN member states with a new set of norms that focus on human rights protection and humanitarian intervention, particularly to save refugees and other peoples threatened by civil conflict and starvation (Deng et al. 1996:5; see also Prendergast 1996). As aptly noted by former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992:9), “The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty . . . has passed; its theory was never matched by reality.” Indeed, the UN has undertaken more than twenty peacekeeping missions in Africa, with the large majority taking place during the post–Cold War era (Adebayo 2011).

The series of UN-sponsored military interventions in Somalia from 1992 to 1995 serves as one of the most notable examples of the UN’s increasingly interventionist role in contemporary Africa. At its height, the UN military operation included over 38,000 troops from twenty countries and led to the effective occupation of southern and central Somalia.
intervention was launched in the absence of any official invitation from a legal Somali authority (which, in any case, did not exist) and in direct opposition to heavily armed militia groups who shared a historical mistrust of UN intentions and operations dating back to the colonial era (Hirsch and Oakley 1995). From the perspective of the UN, the collapse of the Somali state and the intensification of a brutal civil war demanded UN intervention; the conflict was not only spilling over into the neighboring territories of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, but it had contributed to the creation of a humanitarian crisis in which approximately 330,000 Somalis were at “imminent risk of death” (Lyons and Samatar 1995:24). According to this logic, the UN could justify international intervention, even in the absence of an official invitation by a legally constituted authority, on the grounds of “abatement” of a threat to international peace (Joyner 1992:229–246).

The Somali case is part of a growing international trend of prompting even internationally recognized governments to accept UN-sponsored humanitarian intervention (Deng 1993; see also Prendergast 1996). In Sudan, for example, a combination of civil war and drought-induced famine, which led to the deaths of over 500,000 civilians since 1986, prompted the UN Office of Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA) to undertake a humanitarian intervention in 1989 known as Operation Lifeline Sudan (Deng and Minnear 1992). Constituting one of the largest peacetime humanitarian interventions undertaken in UN history, Operation Lifeline Sudan was made possible only by mounting international pressure on the Sudanese regime to recognize the scope of the problem and to accept UN-sponsored intervention. Ultimate acceptance, however, did not ensure ultimate happiness on the part of the Sudanese regime. “Even when the initial issues of involvement are resolved, relations between the donors and the recipient country or population are never entirely harmonious,” explains a group of specialists on conflict resolution, led by Francis Deng, a Sudanese national who served as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for internally displaced persons. “The dichotomy expressed between ‘us’ and ‘them’ becomes inevitable as the nationals feel their pride injured by their own failure and dependency, while the donors and relief workers resent the lack of gratitude and appreciation” (Deng et al. 1996:11).

African perceptions of eroding sovereignty have been reinforced by the rising influence of international financial institutions in African economies (Mkandawire and Olukoshi 1995). By the beginning of the 1980s, African leaders were struggling to respond to the effects of a continent-wide economic crisis that combined internal economic decline with mounting international debt. In order to obtain necessary international capital, most African leaders had little choice but to turn to two international financial institutions: the IMF, which issues short-term stabilization loans to ensure economic solvency, and the World Bank, which issues long-term loans to promote eco-
conomic development (Jinadu 2018). Unlike typical loans that simply require the recipient to make regular scheduled payments over a specific period of time, those of the IMF and the World Bank have included a series of externally imposed demands, typically referred to as “conditionalities,” designed to restructure African economies and political systems in the image of the northern industrialized democracies (Callaghan and Ravenhill 1993a).

The emergence of economic conditionalities was signaled by the 1981 publication of a World Bank study, Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action. The conclusion of this report was that misguided decisions of the first generation of African leaders were responsible for the mounting economic crisis. To resolve this crisis, the World Bank and the IMF proposed linking all future flows of Western financial capital to the willingness of African leaders to sign and implement structural adjustment programs (SAPs): economic blueprints designed to radically restructure African economies. Four sets of private sector reforms are characteristic of SAPs: (1) the termination of food subsidies that kept food prices artificially low, effectively discouraging farmers from planting food crops; (2) the devaluation of national currencies to stimulate exports and the domestic production of manufactured products; (3) the trimming of government bureaucracies; and (4) the privatization of parastatals (state-owned corporations). In short, the SAPs embodied the liberal economic consensus of the northern industrialized democracies that Africa’s future economic success depended on the pursuit of an export-oriented strategy of economic growth that systematically dismantled all forms of governmental intervention in national economies (Campbell and Loxley 1989; Commins 1988).

A second World Bank report published in 1989, Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth: A Long-Term Perspective Study, heralded the emergence of political conditionalities in IMF- and World Bank–sponsored SAPs. In addition to claiming that African countries following IMF and World Bank economic prescriptions were performing better than those that were not, the 1989 report went beyond previous studies by underscoring that the success of economic reforms was dependent on the promotion of “good governance,” the creation of transparent, accountable, and efficient political systems patterned after those of the northern industrialized democracies. Simply put, the 1989 report signaled an emerging consensus in favor of making all flows of Western financial capital contingent on the willingness of African leaders to promote the liberalization of their respective political systems (World Bank 1989).

The economic and political conditionalities imposed by the IMF and the World Bank have been challenged by African policymakers and academics. During the 1980s, SAPs were criticized for their complete disregard for the political realities African leaders confront. IMF and World Bank economists failed to consider that cutting off government subsidies,
one of the above-noted four pillars of private sector reform always included in SAPs, could lead to often violent urban riots. In Sudan, for example, the launching of an SAP in 1985 sparked an urban insurrection that contributed to the overthrow of the regime of Gaafar Mohammed Nimeiri (Harsch 1989). The implementation of the three remaining pillars of private sector reform also entailed serious political risks, due to their tendency to reinforce short-term economic hardships. The devaluation of the national currency meant an immediate decline in the already marginal buying power of the average citizen, and the trimming of government bureaucracies and the privatization of parastatals triggered significant increases in already high levels of national unemployment. In retrospect, the lack of political sensitivity was a result of the fact that SAPs were usually formulated by international economists with little (if any) political training or firsthand knowledge of the individual African countries their programs were supposed to serve.

SAPs were also challenged by African policymakers and academicians during the 1990s despite the fact that both the IMF and the World Bank had engaged in efforts to assess and, when possible, incorporate African sentiments into policy planning documents. Africans were particularly critical of

The international aid community is heavily represented in Africa’s conflict zones. Photo captures a row of international aid vehicles, led by Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), at the town of Goma, in the eastern portion of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
the consensus of IMF and World Bank economists that economic and political conditionalities were mutually reinforcing and, therefore, could be pursued simultaneously (Sandbrook 1993). As demonstrated by Africa’s experiments with democratization after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the creation of democratic political systems complete with institutional checks and balances has hindered the implementation of SAPs. Indeed, democratically elected African presidents and parliamentary representatives often hesitate to enact legislation that will place significant economic burdens on already impoverished populations and thereby potentially contribute to their political demise the next time elections are held.

The end of the Cold War has had a dramatic effect on the role of conditionalities in the African continent’s international economic relations. The terms of the debate have shifted away from such Cold War–inspired questions as whether Marxism or an African variant of socialism is favorable to capitalism, or whether single-party or multiparty regimes can better promote the welfare of their respective peoples. Instead, the IMF and the World Bank now consider how to best facilitate the creation of capitalist, multiparty political systems throughout Africa.

The critical dilemma confronting Africa’s newly elected democratic leaders is the extent to which they will attempt to work with international financial institutions. If they wholeheartedly embrace SAPs for the future economic health of their societies, they are bound to alienate important actors within their political systems and, therefore, run the risk of losing subsequent democratic elections. In the case of Benin, for example, the democratically elected government of President Soglo was rejected in the 1996 presidential elections after only one term of office, at least partially as a result of his administration’s strong support for externally inspired SAPs. In contrast, if democratically elected African leaders refuse to embrace SAPs, they run the risk of losing access to international capital and contributing to the further decline of their economies.

Cautiously optimistic interpretations suggest that reform-minded African leaders and external supporters of change must adopt “realistic, hardheaded” analyses of Africa’s economic plight that avoid both the Afro-pessimism of critics of change and the overly optimistic cheerleading stance of those who believe that change can be implemented quickly, smoothly, and relatively free of pain (Callaghy and Ravenhill 1993b). According to this viewpoint, although even the best-intentioned and most reform-minded African leaders may find themselves “hemmed in” by a variety of international constraints that restrict policy choices, they are capable of pursuing paths that may lead to economic success over the long term (Callaghy and Ravenhill 1993b). More pessimistic interpretations from the dependency tradition suggest that African countries “desperate for access to international capital” are “uniquely vulnerable” to the demands of the IMF and the World Bank.
“While dependency analysts long argued that international capitalist structures provided the context within which development in Africa occurred,” explains William Reed (1992:85), “it was only as Africa approached the 1990s that international financial institutions—controlled by the leading capitalist powers and designed to bolster the international capitalist economy—were able to impose policy prescriptions directly upon African governments.”

African leaders have sought to curb the impact of economic and political conditionalities by formulating alternative frameworks for development. One of the earliest attempts was the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) at the 1980 OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The LPA was not taken seriously in international financial circles due to its contradictory assumption that Western governments and financial institutions would finance the pursuit of self-reliant economic development designed to delink the African continent from the international economic system. In 1989, the Economic Commission for Africa published a document, *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socioeconomic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP)*, that drew at least the grudging acceptance of IMF and World Bank economists. Acknowledging that African leaders were partially responsible for Africa’s economic crisis and that some form of economic restructuring was necessary, the 1989 report nonetheless castigated the IMF and the World Bank for ignoring the social and political impacts of SAPs. The report specifically called on international donor agencies to promote “structural adjustment with a human face”: to plan for and respond to the short-term negative social impacts (e.g., rising unemployment) that inevitably accompany the good-faith efforts on the part of African leaders to implement SAPs (UNECA 1989).

One far-reaching alternative framework for development advanced by African leaders and placed under the guidance of the AU was the New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) (Ikome 2007). The essence of NEPAD was a recognition by African countries that they needed to undertake economic and political reforms if they wished to attract from the northern industrialized democracies the foreign capital deemed necessary for Africa’s development (Hope 2002). Specifically, African leaders sought increases in grant aid (as opposed to loans that must be paid back), foreign investment, and trade from the northern industrialized democracies. In return, they agreed to participate in a two-stage African Peer Review Mechanism to assess the degree to which they were undertaking promised economic and political reforms. Whereas stage one involved undertaking a self-assessment, stage two involved submitting the assessment for review by a group of eminent Africans. The process was significantly flawed, in that authoritarian regimes, such as the dictatorship of Paul Kagame in Rwanda, not surprisingly gave themselves glowing self-reviews, which were then essentially rubber-
stamped by the panel of eminent Africans. In essence, the peer review process and NEPAD more generally were “doing little more than legitimizing authoritarian governments in the eyes of donors by providing them with a regional stamp of approval” (Whitaker and Clark 2018:141). Although ultimately unsuccessful, the NEPAD “goal of having a selective international organization with clear criteria for membership and a rigorous process of peer review remained intriguing to observers,” including Africans who wish to emulate similar (and successful) structures and processes within the European Union (Whitaker and Clark 2018:141).

A second alternative framework for development involves the applicability to Africa of the so-called Asian model of development: the rapid, export-oriented growth that led to the economic success of the “Asian tigers” of Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan (World Bank 1993). The example of South Korea is especially noteworthy. Success in this case was largely due to authoritarian policies that directly contradict the political conditionalities imposed on African leaders. In South Korea, a military leadership intent on ending corruption and promoting economic development illegally took power in a 1961 military coup d’état and significantly curtailed political pluralism and participation (Callaghy and Ravenhill 1993b:546). The implications of this lesson (i.e., that the successful implementation of highly unpopular SAPs requires an enlightened form of authoritarianism) were reinforced by Ghana’s implementation of SAPs during the 1980s under the authoritarian leadership of Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings. Often cited by IMF and World Bank studies as a model for other African countries, the Rawlings regime was able to impose draconian initiatives due to its iron-fisted control over the political system. The authoritarian nature of the Rawlings regime enabled it to impose SAPs that discriminated against the urban population, particularly workers, while preventing the strikes and urban unrest that derailed similar programs in other African countries (Herbst 1993).

The potential significance of authoritarianism in Ghana’s successful economic transformation and the Asian success story of another dictatorship—the PRC—has not been lost on authoritarian African leaders seeking to transform their economies and international relations while at the same time maintaining their hold over political power. Although Ghana has ultimately emerged as one of the most democratic countries in contemporary Africa, Chinese leaders proudly proclaim (and demonstrate) that the PRC model of economic growth and development can be achieved without political liberalization. Not surprisingly, China’s phenomenal economic growth, which in recent decades has allowed the country to flex its socioeconomic and political-military muscle in international relations, has not been lost on African leaders. Moreover, the PRC is increasingly offering an alternative source of loans and financing to African leaders, dictators and democrats alike, who chafe at the political demands for reform from the northern industrialized
democracies. A resurgent, authoritarian Russia appears to be joining China in promoting such an authoritarian model of development. Together, these two powers provide a powerful pole of support for African leaders in search of alternatives to the neoliberal model of open economies, SAPs, and democratic multiparty political systems. At the very minimum, the rise of these two authoritarian great powers contributes to a more pluralistic international environment in which African leaders are increasingly able to play one great power against another so as to achieve the best deals for their countries.

Toward the Future
The end of the Cold War and the rise of democratization movements served as transformative events in the evolution of the international relations of the African continent. These events in turn allow us to draw some tentative conclusions about the dependency-decolonization debate. Although neither approach was completely supported or rejected by the analysis, three trends—the democratization of African foreign policies, rising competition among the great powers, and the rising assertiveness of African regional powers—suggest that African leaders are exerting greater control over the international relations of their respective countries. Yet proponents of the dependency approach can point to the increasingly pervasive nature of intervention on the part of the UN and international financial institutions as supportive of their vision of international relations. Moreover, despite some promising developments related to SADC and ongoing efforts within the AU to promote democracy and regional security, neither the AU’s pursuit of pan-Africanism nor regional experiments in economic cooperation and integration offer compelling evidence to resolve the dependency-decolonization debate. A common element in all five of the topics that I have discussed, however, is the potential importance of the democratization process and its impact on the rise of a new generation of African leaders committed to democratic principles. Although it is perhaps too early to tell, one can hypothesize that, if democratization becomes more deeply embedded in Africa, it will facilitate the peeling away of another layer of dependency and allow a new generation of African leaders to assume greater control over the international relations of their respective countries.

Notes
1. The only exceptions to this trend include President George H. W. Bush’s one-day visit to Somalia in 1993 while in transit to the Middle East, and President Jimmy Carter’s March 29–April 2, 1978, visit to Nigeria.
3. Somali distrust of the UN stems from the decision of that international body to support the reimposition in 1950 of Italian colonial rule over what is currently known as the Republic of Somalia.